

SOME ELEMENTS NECESSARY TO RACE DEVELOPMENT

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SOME ELEMENTS NECESSARY TO RACE DEVELOPMENT ¹

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AMONG the most highly developed races we observe certain dominant characteristics, certain very essential elements of character by which they have so influenced mankind and helped the world that they were enabled to write their names in history so indelibly as to withstand the test of time.

Your education, your observation, your occupation, have brought you into close touch and into personal and vital relations with the fundamental problems of life. We may call it the trust problem, the labor problem, the Indian problem, or perhaps the Negro problem. I like to call it the "Human Race Problem."

The dawn of history breaks upon the world at strife, a universal conflict of man at war with his brother. The very face of the earth

¹ An address delivered at the Tuskegee Commencement, May, 1912

has been dyed in blood and its surface whitened with human bones in an endeavor to establish a harmonious and helpful adjustment between man and man. There can be no interest more fundamental or of greater concern to the human family than the proper adjustment of man's relations to his brother.

You and I belong to an undeveloped, backward race that is rarely for its own sake taken into account in the adjustment of man's relation to man, but is considered largely with reference to the impression which it makes upon the dominant Anglo-Saxon. The Negro's very existence is itself somewhat satellitious, and secondary only to the great white orb around which he revolves. If by chance any light does appear in the black man's sphere of operations, it is usually assumed that it is reflected from his association with his white brother. The black is generally projected against the white and usually to the disadvantage and embarrassment of the former. It becomes very easy, therefore, to see in our minds and hearts what is so apparent in our faces—darkness there and nothing more."

But you must keep in mind that the Negro is a tenth part of a great cosmopolitan commonwealth ; he is a part of a nation to which God has given many very intricate problems to work out. Who

knows but that this nation is God's great laboratory which is being used by the Creator to show the rest of the world what it does not seem thoroughly to understand, that it is possible for all God's people, even the two most extreme types, the black and the white, to live together harmoniously and helpfully.

The question that the American nation must face, and which the Negro as a part of the nation should soberly and dispassionately consider, is the mutual, social, civic, and industrial adjustment upon common ground of two races, differing widely in characteristics and diverse in physical peculiarities, but alike suspicious and alike jealous, and alike more or less biased and prejudiced each toward the other. Without doubt the physical peculiarities of the Negro, which are perhaps the most superficial of all the distinctions, are nevertheless the most difficult of adjustment. While I do not believe that a man's color is ever a disadvantage to him, he is very likely to find it an inconvenience sometimes, in some places.

We might as well be perfectly frank and perfectly honest with ourselves ; it is not an easy task to adjust the relations of ten millions of people, who while they may be mature in passion and perhaps in prejudice, are yet to a large extent children in judgment and in expe-

rience, to a race of people not only mature in civilization, but the principles of whose government were based upon more or less mature judgment and experience at the beginning of this nation ; and when we take into account also the wide difference in ethnic types of the two races that are here brought together, the problem becomes one of the gravest intricacy that has ever taxed human wisdom and human patience for solution. This situation makes it necessary for the Negro as a race to grasp firmly two or three fundamental elements.

The first is *race consciousness*.

The Negro must play essentially the primary part in the solution of this problem. Since his emancipation he has conclusively demonstrated to most people that he possesses the same faculties and susceptibilities as the rest of human mankind ; this is the greatest victory the race has achieved during its years of freedom. Having demonstrated that his faculties and susceptibilities are capable of the highest development, it must be true of the black race, as it has been true of other races, that it must go through the same process and work out the same problem in about the same way as other races have done.

We can and we have profited very much by the examples of progressive races. This is a wonderful advantage and we have not been

slow to grasp it. But we must remember that we are subject to the same natural factor in the solution of this problem, and that it cannot be solved without considering this factor. The Negro must first of all have a conscientious pride and absolute faith and belief in himself. He must not unduly depreciate race distinctions and allow himself to think that because out of one blood God created all nations of the earth, brotherhood is already an accomplished reality. Let us not deceive ourselves, blighted as we are with a heritage of moral leprosy from our past history and hard pressed as we are in the economic world by foreign immigrants and by native prejudice ; our one surest haven of refuge is in ourselves ; our one safest means of advance is our belief in and implicit trust in our own ability and worth. (No race that despises itself, that laughs at and ridicules itself, that wishes to God it were anything else but itself, can ever be a great people.) There is no power under heaven that can stop the onward march of ten millions of earnest, honest, inspired, God-fearing, race-loving, and united people.]

Second, we must have a high moral ideal.

With a strong race consciousness and reasonable prudence, a people with a low, vacillating, and uncertain moral ideal may, for a time, be able to stem the tide of outraged virtue, but this is merely

transitory. Ultimate destruction and ruin follow absolutely in the wake of moral degeneracy ; this all history shows, this experience teaches. God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Not long ago I stood in the city of Rome amid its ruined fountains, crumbling walls, falling aqueducts, ancient palaces, and amphitheatres, today mere relics of ancient history. One is struck with wonder and amazement at the magnificent civilization which that people was able to evolve. It does not seem possible that the Roman people, who could so perfect society in its organic and civic relations and leave to the world the organic principles which must always lie at the base of all subsequent social development, it does not seem possible that such a people should so decay as to leave hardly a vestige of its original stock, or that such cities as the Romans erected should so fall as to leave scarcely one stone upon another. Neither does it seem credible that a people who could so work out in its philosophical aspect man's relation to the eternal mystery, and come as near a perfect solution as is perhaps possible for the human mind to reach, that a people who could give to the world such literature,

such art, such ideals of physical and intellectual beauty as did the Greeks, could so utterly perish from the face of the earth ; yet this is the case not only with Rome and Greece but with a score or more of nations which were once masters of the world. The Greeks, Romans, Persians, Egyptians, and even God's chosen people, allowed corruption and vice to so dwarf their moral sense that there was, according to the universal law of civilization, nothing left for them but death and destruction.

It is no reproach to the Negro to say that his history and environment in this country have well-nigh placed him at the bottom of the moral scale. This must be remedied, if the Negro is ever to reach his full status of civilized manhood and womanhood. It must come through the united efforts of the educated among us, united not for spoils, not to disgrace religion with immoral practices, nor yet to merely protest and pass resolutions. No one can beat us solving the race problem by resolutions. Educated Negroes a thousand miles away from Alabama have been kind enough to settle every question and solve every problem affecting the race by beautiful resolutions which are seldom read outside the immediate community and often affect no one, not even the people who pass them. We

must be united to stop the ravages of disease among our people ; united to keep black boys from idleness, vice, gambling, and crime ; united to guard the purity of black womanhood, and, I might add, black manhood also. It is not enough to simply protest that ninety-five out of every hundred Negroes are orderly and law-abiding. The ninety-five must be banded together to restrain and suppress the vicious five.

Though sad to relate, there is a widening chasm between the educated Negro and his less fortunate brother. This may be natural, but it is nevertheless very disastrous. This chasm must be bridged by a more practical sympathy and a more friendly and vital personal contact. The people must be impressed with the idea that a high moral character is absolutely essential to the highest development of every race, white quite as much as black. There is no creature so low and contemptible as he who does not seek first the approval of his own conscience and of his God, for, after all, how poor is human recognition when you and your God are aware of your inward integrity of soul ! If the Negro will keep clean hands and a pure heart, he can stand up before all the world and say, " Doubtless Thou, O Lord, art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not. "

Third, and last, *the Negro needs intelligent industry.*

Slavery taught the Negro many things for which he should be profoundly thankful—the Christian religion, the English language, and, in a measure, civilization, which in many aspects may be crude in form; but these have placed him a thousand years ahead of his African ancestors.

Slavery taught the Negro to work by rule and rote but not by principle and method. It did not and perhaps could not, teach him to love and respect labor, but left him on the contrary with the idea that manual industry was a thing to be despised and gotten rid of, if possible; that to work with one's hands was a badge of inferiority. A tropical climate is not conducive to the development of practical energy. Add to the Negro's natural tendency his unfortunate heritage from slavery and we see at once that the race needs especially to be rooted and grounded in the underlying scientific principles of concrete things. The time when the world bowed before mere abstract, impractical knowledge has well-nigh passed; the demand of this age and hour is not so much what a man knows—though the world respects and reveres knowledge and always will,

I hope—what the world wants to know is what a man can do and how well he can do it.

We must not be misled by high-sounding phrases as to the kind of education the race should receive, but we should remember that the education of a people should be conditioned upon their capacity, social environment, and the probable life which they will lead in the immediate future. We fully realize that the ignorant must be taught, the poor must have the gospel, and the vicious must be restrained, but we also realize that these do not strike the “bed-rock” of a permanent, lasting citizenship.

If the Negro will add his proportionate contribution to the economic aspect of the world's civilization it must be done through intelligent, well-directed, conscientious, skilled industry. Indeed, the feasible forms of civilization are nothing but the concrete actualization of intelligent thought applied to what are sometimes called common things.

The primary sources of wealth are agriculture, mining, manufacture, and commerce. These are the lines along which the thoughtful energy of the black race must be directed. I mean by

agriculture, *farming*—the raising of corn, cotton, peas, and potatoes, pigs, chickens, horses, and cows.

Land may be bought practically anywhere in the South almost at our own price. Twenty years hence, with the rapidly developing Southern country and the strenuous efforts to fill it up with foreign immigrants, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for us to buy land. Don't get the idea that because land is cheap today it will always remain cheap. Don't be misled either with the notion that because work is plentiful for the colored man, that it will always be plentiful. God gave the Children of Israel the "Land of Canaan" but, O what a life and death struggle they had to take possession of it and hold on to it. God has given to the Negro here in this Southern country two of the most fundamental necessities in his development—*land* and *labor*. If you don't possess this land and hold this labor, God will tell you as He has often told other races—"to move on."

The Creator never meant that this beautiful land should be forever kept as a great hunting ground for the Indian to roam over in savage bliss, but he intended that it should be used. The Indian, having for scores of generations failed to develop this land, God asked the Anglo-Saxon to take possession and dig out the treasures of wheat,

corn, cotton, gold and silver, coal and iron, and the poor Indian was told "to move on."

The Negro in Africa sits listlessly in the sunshine of barbarous idleness while the same progressive, indomitable, persevering white man is taking possession; the same edict has gone forth to the native African—he is being told "to move on."

The same God will tell the white man in America and in Africa, if he does not mete out absolute justice and absolute fairness to his weaker and less advantaged brother, black or red or brown, if he cannot do justly and love mercy, just as he told the patricians of Rome, he will tell the white man "to move on."

Whatever question there may be about the white man's part in this situation, there is no doubt about ours. Don't let us fool ourselves, but keep in mind the fact that the man who owns his home and cultivates his land and lives a decent, self-respecting, useful, and helpful life is no problem anywhere. We talk about the "color line," but you know and I know, that the blackest Negro in Alabama or Mississippi or Africa or anywhere else, who puts the same amount of skill and energy into his farming gets as large returns for his labor as the whitest Anglo-Saxon. The earth yields up her increase as

willingly to the skill and persuasions of the black as of the white husbandman. Wind, wave, heat, steam, and electricity are absolutely blind forces and see no race distinction and draw no "color line." The world's market does not care and it asks no questions about the shade of the hand that produces the commodity, but it does insist that it shall be up to the world's requirements.

I thank God for the excellent chance to work that my race has in this Southern country ; the Negro in America has a real good, healthy job, and I hope he may always keep it. I am not particular what he does or where he does it, so he is engaged in honest, useful work. Let no one of us ever be ashamed or humiliated when we are called *workmen*; let us be proud of the distinction. Remember always that building a house is quite as important as building a poem; that the science of cooking is as useful to humanity as the science of music; that the thing most to be desired is a harmonious and helpful adaptation of all the arts and sciences to the glory of God and the good of humanity; that whether we labor with muscle or with brain, both need divine inspiration. Let us consecrate our brain and muscle to the highest and noblest service to God and humanity.

WORDS TO THE GRADUATING CLASS

I wish, first of all, however, to congratulate you, the members of the graduating class, upon the fact that you have come thus successfully to the culmination of your career in this institution. I congratulate you also upon the peculiar character of the education you have received and upon the efficient and conscientious corps of instructors you have had.

May I briefly remind you of three very commonplace virtues that may perhaps help you as you enter a broader, and, I hope, more useful life.

BE SIMPLE

Simplicity is a quality that is hardly likely to be overworked; certainly it is a very safe and sane side on which you may profitably err. It is charged that the educated Negro is greatly inclined toward the superficial and showy, that he is much given to "putting on airs." Don't be afraid or ashamed to be even criticised because of natural unaffectedness, of extreme simplicity in dress, in speech, in conduct, and in character.

It is said that the "Bushman," dressed in the latest Parisian fashion, struts proudly through the streets of London in the firm belief

that in a few short months he has compassed all the vast distance between African barbarism and modern civilization; but as a matter of fact he has grasped only the foam and froth of civilization without considering the living water upon which they float.

As I understand this institution, the object has not been to make of you mere farmers and mechanics, nor yet cooks and dressmakers. It has not even tried to make mere teachers and preachers, although it has accomplished that task most effectively ; but these vocations, however well they may have been learned, are subsidiary to the great object that lies at the base of Tuskegee Institute. It has tried, and I hope it has succeeded, in making of you men and women with strong, robust, generous, courageous, simple, Christ-like characters; that, my friends, is the "bed-rock" upon which this institution was founded and upon which it stands, and that is the meaning of this magnificent gathering, this commencement. This school, therefore, stands for real, rational simplicity.

BE SELF-RESPECTING

I want to ask you young people always to keep your self-respect. Self-respect does not mean fawning, cringing, or truckling. No one

detests a fawning, truckling, or cringing Negro more than the aristocratic Southern white man, and no one respects the honest, law-abiding, straightforward Negro more than the aristocratic Southern gentleman. You will be careful, I am sure, not to confuse self-respect with self-conceit ; they are sometimes woefully mixed and even by educated Negroes, that is, Negroes who have received diplomas from reputable institutions.

I am not unmindful of the conditions under which we live. It is very easy for a race to accept the valuation which others set upon it ; to conclude that it is after all “ good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of man,” but there is no excuse for your going through the world with a sort of self-depreciatory demeanor as if you owed the rest of mankind an apology for existing. Remember that you are creatures of God’s most perfect handiwork and that any lack of appreciation on your part is a reflection on the God who made you. Remember also that though a Negro, and black, and though belonging to a backward and somewhat undeveloped race, God meant that you should be as honest, as industrious, as law-abiding, as intelligent, as cultivated, as polite,

as pure, as Christ-like, and as godly as any human being that walks on the face of God's green earth.

KEEP YOUR COURAGE

There is no reason why any Negro should become discouraged or morbid. We believe in God ; His providence is mysterious and inscrutable ; but his ways are just and righteous altogether. Suffering and disappointment have always found their place in the divine economy. It took four hundred years of slavery in Egypt and a sifting process of forty years in the " Wilderness " to teach Israel to respect their race and to fit them for entrance into the " Promised Land. " The black man has not as yet thoroughly learned to have the respect for his race that is so necessary to the making of a great people. I believe the woes that God has sent him are but the fiery furnace through which he is passing, that is separating the dross from the pure gold and is welding the Negroes together as a great people for a great purpose.

There is every reason for optimism, hopefulness. The outlook was never more encouraging than today. The Negro never had more the respect and confidence of his neighbors, black and white, than he

has today. Neither has he because of real worth deserved that respect more than he does today. Could anybody, amid the inspiration of these grounds and buildings, be discouraged about the future of the Negro ? The race problem in this country, I repeat, is simply a part of the problem of life. It is the adjustment of man's relation to his brother, and this adjustment began when Cain slew Abel. Race prejudice is as much a fact as the law of gravitation and it is as foolish to ignore the operation of one as of the other. Mournful complaint and arrogant criticism are as useless as the crying of a baby against the fury of a great wind. The path of moral progress, remember, has never taken a straight line, but I believe that unless democracy is a failure and Christianity a mockery, it is entirely feasible and practicable for the black and the white races of America to develop side by side, in peace, in harmony, and in mutual helpfulness each toward the other ; living together as "brothers in Christ without being brothers-in-law," each making its contributions to the wealth and culture of our beloved country.

You are soon to join the ranks of the great army of graduates who have gone out from this institution. They have set the standard very high ; they have rendered excellent service to their people, their

country, their God. Not a white boy or girl in all America has such a chance to mould, to fashion, to help, to lead his people as is given to you. Not a white boy in all the world has had before him as his teacher and constant *inspiration* so unique, so picturesque, so heroic, so devoted, so sublime an example of simplicity, of courage, of patient industry, of self-sacrificing devotion to duty, as you have had in the person at the head of this institution.

For nearly a quarter of a century I have had the honor and the pleasure of the acquaintance and confidence of your Principal ; I have been with him amid the varying circumstances and conditions under which the American Negro lives and moves. I have heard him day after day, at the point of exhaustion, plead the cause of his race, the cause of his country, the cause of black, the cause of white. I give this as my deliberate and careful observation, that I have never heard him say an uncharitable, an ungenerous word against the white man, against the Northern man, or against the Southern man.

I have never seen him do or even countenance a small or a mean, unkind act.

I have never known him to be too busy or too tired to render

service with voice or pen or even means, where a human need demanded.

In all my experience I have never met a more simple, patient, sympathetic, judicious, courageous, generous, helpful character.

What a wonderful inspiration this must be to this class, what a peerless legacy you have, what a beautiful heritage is yours ! I thank God for you and for myself, that in his infinite wisdom and goodness he has given you and the Negro race such a leader, and to this nation such a beautiful character.

I close with these lines, from an anonymous poet, on "The Water Lily : "

“ O star on the breast of the river,
O marvel of bloom and grace,
Did you fall straight down from heaven,
Out of the sweetest place ?
You are white as the thought of the angel
Your heart is steeped in the sun,
Did you grow in the golden city,
My pure and radiant one ?

“Nay, nay, I fell not out of heaven,
None gave me my saintly white ;
It slowly grew in the blackness,
Down in the dreary night,
From the ooze of the silent river,
I won my glory and grace ;
White souls fall not, O my poet,
They *rise* to the sweetest place.





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